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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused January 4 news coverage on KMT presidential Ma Ying-jeou's suit against the prosecutor who indicted him for corruption; on Brazilian authorities' unexpected cessation of issuance of visas to tourists from Taiwan; the upcoming legislative election; and on the rise of oil and commodity prices. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" criticized the United States opposition to Taiwan's UN referendum and asked the United States to respect the Taiwan people's will and Taiwan's democratic development.

"Enough Muddle-Headed Warnings"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (1/4):

"... The decision [about KMT boycotts of the two referenda to be held along with the legislative election on January 12] came just a few weeks after KMT vice presidential candidate Vincent Siew allegedly told American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt that the KMT was insisting on the two-step voting process to frustrate the DPP-initiated referendum on entering the UN using the name 'Taiwan.'

"It would be interesting to know if Burghardt's conversations with any of the KMT officials he met during his visit touched on the subject of a boycott, as any decision to shun the UN plebiscite in March would certainly fall in line with Washington's very public opposition to the process. ...

"... In a September speech to the US-Taiwan Business Council, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen accused President Chen Shui-bian of using the referendum to 'charge Taiwan's name' and 'risk the security interests of the Taiwan people for short term political gain.' ...

"Perhaps Christensen could have been asked to suggest which political party in the democratic world does not attempt to influence public opinion to further its ambitions. The Republicans certainly did so when it made the case for the invasion of Iraq. ...

"... Even now it is not clear if US strategists are banking on economic reform leading to democratic reform in China and a peaceful settlement in the Taiwan Strait. But even if this is the case, it is not going to happen anytime soon. Hard-headed officials must therefore understand that Taiwan's status cannot remain in limbo indefinitely if China issues threats every few months and continues to pack its coastline with ordnance.

"Taiwanese are not stupid; indeed, they are reliably pragmatic. Poll after poll has shown that the overwhelming majority are not interested in making dramatic ideological gambits in the cause of

independence or unification.

"So, if Washington believes that this thing called 'democracy' has value outside the US, then it should show respect to Taiwanese by desisting with patronizing language and partisan doomsaying. Voters of goodwill are putting up with enough cynical, anti-democratic behavior from the KMT without having to factor in muddle-headed warnings from Washington."

YOUNG